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PHL 101L.R01: Introduction to Philosophy

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Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Professor Matthew Strohl

My email: matthew.strohl@umontana.edu

TA: Georgia Grimm

Her email: georgia.grimm@umontana.edu

Class meetings: TR 9:30-10:50

Zoom: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/97567508524>

Meeting ID: 975 6750 8524

My office hours: TR 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

Zoom: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/91346102581>

Meeting ID: 913 4610 2581

When you join you will be in a waiting room, I will usher you in to meet with me one at a time unless there is something to discuss as a group.

Gia's office hours: W 2-3pm

Zoom: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/99305716812>

Meeting ID: 993 0571 6812

Course description:

This course will introduce you to the methods of philosophy through a tour of lively topics that I hope you will find relevant and engaging. These topics will likely include food, bullshit on the internet, democracy, sex, pornography, horror movies, and the meaning of life.

Because remote teaching is a new form of pedagogy to me, I'm going to try to keep things flexible and be ready to make adjustments to the course if something isn't working. Please do be in touch with feedback: What's helping you learn? What's confusing you or otherwise interfering with your engagement with the course? What might help?

Assignments and grading

20% participation: attend class meetings (you can miss three no questions asked), participate in chat and breakout discussions.

50% short writing assignments: There are 8 assignments. You must complete 5 of them. You can do all 8 for extra credit, which can compensate for a lower grade in participation or the paper according to our discretion.

30% final essay.

Academic misconduct:

Do not plagiarize. We will almost certainly catch you if you do, and in any case you are only cheating yourself. Remote teaching already presents special challenges. We're going to do our best to overcome these challenges and give you a solid course, but the course won't benefit you if you don't do the work yourself.

CUTTING AND PASTING FROM UNCREDITED SOURCES THAT YOU FOUND ON THE INTERNET IS PLAGIARISM, EVEN IF YOU CHANGE THE WORDING. ALWAYS CITE ANY SOURCES THAT WERE NOT ASSIGNED IN CLASS.

You are strictly held to the University of [Montana Student Conduct Code](#) .

Special needs:

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable modifications in this course. Your responsibilities are to request them from me with sufficient advance notice, and to be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. Please email or speak with me after class or during my office hours to discuss the details. For more information, visit the [Disability Services for Students website](#).

Course Schedule:

Topic 1: Food

- 8/20 What is a sandwich?
- 8/25 **Assignment 1 due:** write a brief theory of what a sandwich is. Breakout groups to argue about sandwiches
- 8/27 Heldke and Thomsen, "Two Concepts of Authenticity"
- 9/1 Strohl, "On Culinary Authenticity"
- 9/3 Shen-yi Liao, "Bittersweet Foods."
- 9/8 **Assignment 2 due:** write a ~2 page reflection about some food that's important to you, explaining and making use of at least one idea from the readings. Breakout groups to discuss nostalgia and food.

Topic 2: Internet apocalypse

- 9/10 Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"
- 9/15 Thi Nguyen, "Escaping the Echo Chamber"
- 9/17 **Assignment 3 due:** Find one example of an echo chamber or one example of bullshit that is not already mentioned in the readings and is not primarily about politics—pick something fun and unlikely to get others angry . Write a 1-2 page explanation of how your example fits the account of bullshit or echo chambers from the readings. Breakout groups for show and tell and discussion. Each breakout group pick your favorites and email them to me. I will compile them and email to the class.

Topic 3: Our democracy maybe not so great?

- 9/22 <https://aeon.co/ideas/the-right-to-vote-should-be-restricted-to-those-with-knowledge>
- 9/24 <https://aeon.co/essays/forget-voting-it-s-time-to-start-choosing-our-leaders-by-lottery>

- 9/29 **Assignment 4 due:** write a ~2 page essay laying out an argument for or against either proposal. Discussion

Topic 4: Sex and Porn

- 10/1 <https://aeon.co/essays/consent-and-refusal-are-not-the-only-talking-points-in-sex>
- 10/6 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person>; Breakout groups to discuss the story. I encourage participation in this exercise but because I understand that this is a sensitive, upsetting, or embarrassing topic for some people, you can skip it, no questions asked.
- 10/8 **Assignment 5 due:** Explain in about 2 pages how Kukla's theory can help make sense of what goes wrong in *Cat Person*. You can also evaluate that claim as it is presented in the reading for today. <https://medium.com/@aaronyarmel/bad-sex-and-what-to-do-instead-9cc59ec8eebe>
- 10/13 A.W. Eaton, "A Sensible Anti-Porn Feminism"
- 10/15 <https://aeon.co/essays/does-too-much-pornography-numb-us-to-sexual-pleasure> AND Liao and Protasi, "The fictional character of pornography"

ALSO: CLEAR ESSAY TOPIC BY THIS DATE IF YOU WANT TO WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN CLASS MATERIAL

- 10/20 **Assignment 6 due:** Write a short explanation of what you think the difference is between harmful and beneficial porn/erotica. Breakout groups: What do you think the difference is between porn that is more likely to be harmful and porn (or "erotica") that has a better chance of being healthy and beneficial? (same deal as the first sex topic, re: attendance)

Topic 5: Horror movies

- 10/22 Noel Carroll on horror
- 10/27 **ZOOM HORROR MAYHEM!** Movie: *Halloween* (Carpenter)
- 10/29 **Assignment 7 due:** write a 1-2 page reflection on how you think negative emotions relate to the appreciation of horror, taking account of Carroll. Breakout rooms to discuss the movie.
- 11/3 **NO CLASS** Election day

Topic 6: The meaning of life

- 11/5 Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"
- 11/10 Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"
- 11/12 Movie: *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami)
- 11/17 **Assignment 8 due:** write a 1-2 page reflection on the film and the question of what gives human life meaning.

Final: Due Monday, November 23rd at noon. Write a 4-5 page essay on whatever topic speaks to you, using the structural template I will provide to the class when we discuss this assignment. You must check in with one of us about your plan for the essay and we must agree to it. You can write on a topic from the course or you can write about something else, but if you want to write about something else you must get permission by October 15th to leave adequate time for extra reading and office hours discussion.